

February 1994

## Group Therapy / Status Reports

Rosann Bazirjian  
*Syracuse University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Bazirjian, Rosann (1994) "Group Therapy / Status Reports," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 27.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1518>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

# Group Therapy



Column Editor: **Rosann Bazirjian** (Syracuse University)

*Hey y'all out there! Do you have any gripes?*

*Come to your therapist! Try [rvbazirj@hawk.syr.edu](mailto:rvbazirj@hawk.syr.edu) or FAX (315) 443-9510.*

## GRIPE:

Submitted by **Marie Swearingen-Black**, Syracuse University

The number of status reports received from vendors and publishers stating an item is out of stock and out of stock indefinitely appears to be increasing. What is the reason for the problem? Should we consider these orders for cancellation and attempt to obtain the title from another source, or would it be more accurate to report these items out of print? What is the difference? It's very frustrating for staff and patrons alike when a book is needed for our collections, and the orders remain unfilled for long periods of time.

## PUBLISHER RESPONSE:

Submitted by **Lisa Freeman**, Director, University of Minnesota Press

Maintaining appropriate inventory — enough to fill orders but not so much as to cause cash-flow problems — is a perennial headache for publishers. Out-of-stock notices can result from a number of different circumstances. One frequent cause is a delay in production. Publication dates for each season are set in advance, often before the "real" production schedule for a book is known. Delays can result from difficulties at each stage of the process — proofs delayed from the typesetter, an author who is suddenly seized by the need to re-write her or his book in page proofs, technical problems with the reproduction of artwork.

Thus, a book may be advertised "before its time," with an optimistic publication date that assumes a reasonably normal progression through the production process. In these instances, a book will be reported as out of stock even though it is yet to be published. Although the problem could conceivably be obviated by publishers not advertising books until their actual publication dates are known, the publisher is under equal pres-

sure to get the word out about a forthcoming book in order to both satisfy author demands for advance publicity and to build backorders so that sales are generated as quickly as possible following the release of the book.

Books can also go out of stock between printings. Again, publishers do their best to maintain sufficient stock, but in the case of either very fast moving, or very slow moving, books, this is frequently difficult. In the former case, demand can sometimes take a publisher by surprise. Printers often have backlogs of six to eight weeks, which slow the reprint process. Likewise, for slower-selling books, a publisher may decide to hold off on a decision to reprint in order to better gauge the actual demand for the

*"Could publishers print a small number of 'extra' copies of a title, but not bind them? I'd like to hear a publisher response to this."*

book or to decide whether to reprint in hardcover or paperback.

Finally, it is worth noting that one of the biggest difficulties that publishers face in making reprint decisions is the ever-present possibility of returns. With returns of books (that is, books shipped back from the buyer to the publisher, with the expectation of full credit) running at all-time highs, it is increasingly difficult to gauge how much of a book's initial backorder release will actually "sell through". Thus a publisher can be caught short of inventory after the initial release, only to find dozens of unsold copies being returned six or nine months later. The industry practice of allowing full credit for returned unsold books up to a year after their initial sales makes planning for reprints that much more difficult.

Most publishers distinguish between out-of-stock and out-of-print titles. A book is declared out of print only when there are no plans for future reprints. A

phone call to the publisher's customer service department should provide an answer; sometimes the marketing department can provide more accurate information as it is most often the marketing department that makes the final decision about when, and if, to reprint.

## VENDOR RESPONSE:

Submitted by **Ann Revelt**, National Sales Manager, Franklin Book Co., Inc.

I can certainly understand your frustration with this issue. Before being employed by Franklin, I was a manager for a retail bookstore and I cringed when I saw OSI, Out of Stock Indefinitely, on a listing from a publisher. My response to my customers then, (although I phrased it more politely) was "Don't hold your breath" — not exactly the answer they sought.

The difference between OP, Out of Print, and OSI is simply that with OSI the publisher has not decided whether to reprint a title. The number of OSI reports is increasing and the reason is primarily financial. We know what is happening to the cost of manufacturing and providing printed material (See Group Therapy in the November, 1993 *Against the Grain*). The publishers need to be as cost effective as possible. Print runs are getting smaller because publishers are trying to match the size of the run, as closely as possible, to the anticipated demand. After the first printing the publisher will wait an indefinite period to determine if an investment in another print run will turn a profit. Unfortunately, many customers give up in frustration when they receive a OSI report; therefore, the publisher may never know the true demand for the title. Kind of a "Catch 22", isn't it?

The requester must decide when to cancel based on the urgency of their need for the specific title. If you require the book quickly and an available, alternative volume will fill the need, I would suggest canceling and ordering the new title. However, there are going to be cases



where only that particular title will do. There is no easy solution to this situation.

The Internal Revenue Service further complicates the decision-making process for the publisher. The Thor Power Tool Co., 439 U.S. 522, 1979, decision places additional negative pressures on publishers to declare a title as out of print prematurely or to restrict unnecessarily the reprinting of a title. This decision leads to the delay of a decision to reprint. A discussion of the full impact of Thor in this writing is inappropriate; but, suffice it to say, the amount of tax paid by a publisher is increased if a book remains

in print.

At Franklin we continue to claim an order as long as our customer requires. If the publisher decides to reprint, we will obtain the book immediately after availability. If the book goes out of print, we will notify our customer as soon as we are informed. However, as a distributor we are limited to the information received from the publisher.

Depending on the urgency and the time one can devote to a search, trying alternate sources, i.e., bookstores that specialize in hard to find and OP titles, may yield positive results.

Perhaps through persistent communi-

cation with the publishers, a compromise could be reached. The following idea arose in a discussion at the recent conference in Charleston. Could publishers print a small number of "extra" copies of a title, but not bind them? This way the publishers could reduce their printing costs associated with set up and start runs, yet have the pages available to bind later if the need arises. Print runs would then not need to be determined so close to the belt. I'd like to hear a publisher response to this.

The only solution I can suggest is that we all try holding our breath until we get what we need. €

## Mourning Serial

### The Effect Of Firm Pricing Requests On Publisher Rate Submission To Subscription Agencies

Column Editor: **Phil Greene** (EBSCO Subscription Services)

*For column suggestions or ideas contact your editor or [PGreene@EBSCO.com](mailto:PGreene@EBSCO.com)*



Earlier this year the call for firm prices was sounded by the library community and directed at publishers and subscription agencies. It has been the agency view that the firm pricing responsibility lies solely in publishers' hands. Agencies do not set prices, affect *when* prices are set or have any power to keep them from being adjusted. The agent's responsibility is to make sure the most current prices are integrated into their title database as soon as they are received and to make sure those prices are carried through to customer invoices. As for publishers, we know that major STM (scientific, technical and medical) publishers were notified of the library community's desire for firm prices, set early in the year, through the **Donald Koeppe** letter. Did the letter work? Maybe.

A look at the chart (below) provides a measure of publisher response to this request. In past years, the bulk of major STM rates have been received in August and September. It is interesting to note that as of Sept. 17, 1993, approximately 76 percent of the large publishers in EBSCO's title database (this includes large STM publishers and large commercial publishers) had provided their rates. This is the same percentage of rates that were received from large publishers in 1992.

A random list of STM publishers was analyzed in mid-September. The analysis showed that publishers studied provided new rates an average of 12 days earlier than they did the previous year: some sent rates in one to two months earlier, some sent them in a week later. Of course, one thing that should be kept in mind is that many publishers do not automatically send in rates at all. It takes a major mailing and exhaustive follow up by the subscription agent to procure rates. As mentioned before, we generally receive price change information for more than 90 percent of the STM titles by the end of September in any given year.

Conversely, less than one-third of the other 30,000-plus

small-to-medium size, non-STM publishers have set and sent prices to agencies by September in an average year. These smaller, non-STM publishers did not receive the Koeppe letter. However, some of our casual (not-scientific) observations show that rates for smaller publishers did come in a bit earlier in 1993 than 1992. More seem to have arrived in July than ever before. We're not sure to what this can be attributed. Another observation is that more small publishers seemed to hold prices steady for 1994 subscriptions.

A final observation made by our Title Information Department General Manager **Mary Beth Vanderpoorten** is rather somber and possibly foreshadows the future of firm pricing. When going through a file on a particular publisher, Mary Beth came across their rate sheet. It was hard to miss the extra large, bold type at the top of the list that read "1994 Rates." What was somewhat easier to miss was the small print at the bottom of the page that read "Subject to Change." The fact is the proverbial ball remains "firmly" planted in the publishing community's court. It is understandably difficult to set a price in June for a commodity that is: to be sold in November; often paid for in foreign currency; and subject to last-minute decreased demand (subscription cuts). The firm pricing edict might be a tough one to stick to.

#### 1994 Subscription Rate Receipt Dates

Date	% Lg. Publisher Rates Rec'd
Aug. 17	40
Sept. 9	69
Sept. 17	76
Sept. 24	83
Oct. 1	90

*Special thanks to Mary Beth Vanderpoorten for contributing data used in this article. —PG €*